

# **City of Chattanooga / State of the City 2007**

Mayor Ron Littlefield

April 24, 2007

While this might not be the traditional time for a “State of the City” presentation, it is an appropriate time. We are at the midpoint of this administration – the midpoint of this Mayor’s term and this Council’s term. It’s time for a check-up, a report card, an accounting of where we have been, where we stand today and where we will be going in the future. I appreciate your attention this evening and promise not to overwhelm you with a long laundry list of facts, figures and findings. It has been a busy 2 years, so please allow me to just hit the high spots.

First of all, let me say that I honestly believe that we have one of the finest teams of department administrators that I can recall in my more than three decades of experience with Chattanooga government. I specifically and intentionally emphasize the word “team.” I take nothing away from previous administrations – talented and capable individuals have served in past years – but the old Commission form of government contributed to an atmosphere of competition between departments and thus, sometimes, conflict and a lack of teamwork. Of course, I was part of that old form of government and saw the effects first hand. Accordingly, I supported the change to the Mayor and Council specifically in the hope of achieving greater unity, efficiency and a more cooperative atmosphere for providing city services.

As the years have progressed since the government form changed in 1990, work processes and procedures have been modified. The city code and charter have been rewritten and readopted in a completely updated format. Old, left-over attitudes have steadily improved and working together has become more of a way of life. I can truthfully say that it now appears that the scars of the old divisions have finally healed

and we have fully accomplished a unified and effective system where the citizens of Chattanooga are really getting what they pay for.

I thank these administrators – many of which are veterans of many years and former administrations – for an exceptional display of teamwork and accomplishment.

A few days ago, I asked each department administrator to supply a brief report of whatever they believed to be their greatest achievements of the term - so far. Even that list is way too long for this gathering, so I'll just hit the highlights of the highlights:

The New Kids on the Block: The Departments of Education Arts and Culture, General Services and The Office of Multicultural Affairs literally hit the ground running and scored big wins in their first few months.

Missy Crutchfield set a course for EAC to begin a new magazine “In the City,” promote “Connecting the Dots” - a new citywide summit on arts issues and establish a local film commission – something that the community has been talking about for more than 25 years. I questioned whether all of this was possible but she and her small staff made it happen – all while managing the Tivoli Theater, Memorial Auditorium and making greater use of the Community Theater. Furthermore, EAC has been charged with programming the North River Civic Center, The Eastgate Senior Activity Center and the new Heritage Park in East Brainerd. Someone remarked to me once that they had just come from a meeting with Missy and that she “had a thousand ideas.” I had to respond that they must not have been with her very long.

Jacqueline Strong Moss pulled together the various and scattered resources that had been our city's response to growing diversity and changing demographics and fashioned the new Office of Multicultural Affairs into a strategic force to position Chattanooga as a welcoming, progressive and inclusive community. The Mayor's Power of One Luncheon with Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin and the recognition of Living Legends in our community demonstrated that our city can come together and celebrate how far we have

come in the movement for civil rights. The OMA has reinvigorated our Chattanooga Human Rights and Human Relations Commission and sponsored valuable training on discrimination compliance and fair housing. Her first few months have set a pace that will be hard to top.

Paul Page has resurrected the Division of General Services and consolidated functions of purchasing, city fleet, radio shop, facilities, real property and parking into a cohesive unit that takes advantage of synergies in employee skills and city resources. Most notably, fleet services was placed into a working capital account or enterprise fund so that the city can stop using money from 20 to 30 year bond issues to pay for vehicles that might last less than 5 years. There have been a number of significant technical revisions in the way that the city will be purchasing goods and contract for services in the future to better employ economies of scale. All this has been accomplished while Page has been serving as the general contractor for creation of our new employee clinics and wellness center and as our project manager for the renovation of City Hall.

Our uniformed protective services continued to show that those who accept danger as part of their job description are among Chattanooga's greatest assets.

Fire Chief Wendell Rowe has set his sights on greater training and technical capabilities as his department continues to serve our city. In recent months, his department has taken delivery of a new fire boat to extend coverage to our developing waterfront and a new Fire Safety House to teach the public – especially children – about how to avoid and survive fires. The recently established Public Education Division within the department will extend the reach of our fire prevention efforts. Chief Rowe and his staff activated the Urban Search and Rescue Team and accepted a donation of a 53 foot tractor trailer rig for outfitting as a fully equipped response vehicle for major calamities. To extend future efforts, they identified a part of the old Volunteer Army Ammunition facility as an excellent (and economical) site for a regional training center for all our emergency service workers. In this age of natural and manmade disasters and, the likelihood of being called upon to render major aid to our own or other cities outside our immediate

metro area is a growing concern – and we must be ready. Katrina taught us all that lesson.

The police department has experienced a change in leadership as Chief Steve Parks handed over the reins to Chief Freeman Cooper – perhaps the smoothest transition that I have ever witnessed in my years with city government. The department has been reorganized to suit the changing needs of Chattanooga and obtained recertification as an accredited service. This was not a small accomplishment. While there has been a notable reduction in property crime the greatest challenge faced by this and other urban police departments is the rising level of violent crime being experienced throughout the United States at this time. It is not news that we have already recorded several homicides and – just this past weekend – a shooting incident in an otherwise quiet neighborhood. But it is reassuring to note that our excellent police department has a 100 percent clearance rate on these high profile incidents. Bad guys beware. Based on the principal that prevention is more cost effective than correction, the department has been cooperating with Al Chapman, Director of the Mayor’s Office of Faith Based Initiatives and Rev. Terne Jordan to implement “Stop the Madness” a leadership and mentoring training program to reach at-risk youth. The program has graduated its first class of 30 community ministers and other leaders who underwent a 12 week orientation and familiarization course with principals in the Police Department.

Still more in the way of prevention, the department is making greater use of technology. You might have seen how the speed cameras recently installed in the Hixson Pike “S curves” were able to solve a case of vehicular homicide. Well, at tonight’s meeting of the city council, plans were presented for significantly expanding the areas under video surveillance throughout the downtown parks and riverfront --one example of a creative use of technology to expand the capabilities of our police force and make better use of manpower is the vehicle on display outside. Please note that the unit is clearly marked “surveillance unit” and the shaded windows might make you miss the camera mounted inside. This unit and others – really just old police cruisers recently taken out of regular service – will be available to be placed in areas of suspected illegal activity. We will not

need to tie up a police officer for days on end while gathering evidence – we can do that with technology. The units are wireless and everything that is recorded can be used in court. In case someone thinks such units might be vandalized, just think about it. We will be able to take any vandal's smiling face to court and prosecute. I expect these units to be very popular – especially in neighborhoods. As Councilman Pierce said to me in regards to this plan, we might not completely stop crime, but we will at least keep them moving.

The Public Works Department is the city's housekeeper. Under leadership of Administrator Steve Leach and his team, the department has completed the long awaited improvement of Igou Gap Road and began the widening and reconstruction of Ashland Terrace – another project promised (in this case) more than 20 years ago. We're getting it done. More sidewalks have been built and rebuilt than at any previous period in city history. We just received a national award for our bikeway system – thanks to Public Works. Preparation has begun for opening of Phase III of the city's sanitary landfill which will provide our community with approximately 28 years of additional space for waste disposal. With that in mind, let me say a few words about recycling.

First of all, I know of no city with a better record of recycling and waste management. It is a fact that the city is now burying only about 25% of the quantity of waste that we handled in 1988. In other words, the city is reducing, recycling or diverting about 75% of its solid waste. Landfill space is not our major environmental issue. Air quality, however, remains a big issue and it is neither economically nor environmentally responsible for us to be operating large fleets of heavy trucks running around every week to pick up an ever diminishing volume of mostly paper from households. Burning about 10 gallons of diesel fuel and filling the air with hydrocarbons and pollutants to recover each and every ton of paper does not make environmental sense. It's not environmentally responsible. This administration has joined more than 450 other American cities in supporting the U.S. Conference of Mayors Climate Protection Agreement – a commitment to reduce greenhouse gases - and that means more responsible use of fuels. We must find a more effective and efficient way to get the job done.

Second, we have no choice – we must provide more and better convenience centers for collection of recyclables. It is not possible to collect glass and electronics from households by truck – too much breakage. Accordingly, we must work with our partners at Orange Grove and their new recycling coordinator to assure that convenience centers are properly located and staffed. We must also provide alternate drop-off locations at fire stations, schools and other public facilities. We can park trailers in selected locations and monitor them with video cameras. There is a better way.

Third and finally, we must improve the way that we provide monthly service. I want to see us move toward a container system similar to that used for garbage. We should begin to recruit committed recyclers to use covered bins such as this one (blue bin) for collection of all paper, plastic and cans. These bins will keep the recyclables clean and dry and will enable us to use automated equipment for collection. Ultimately, I propose a small fleet of “big green machines” – special trucks running on clean, alternative fuels to collect our monthly volumes of newsprint and other materials. Such a system would be an appropriate compliment to our other environmental initiatives.

The Department of Parks and Recreation has been rebuilding and preparing for even greater achievements in the future. After veteran professional Larry Zehnder returned to head the department, he went through a rigorous process to recruit top rank individuals to head the two basic divisions. That process is complete and they are off and running. They’ve had a good year – and I expect that they will have another good year next year and the year after that and so on.....And that’s good because Parks and Recreation are important elements for reaching out to our youth – for that prevention instead of correction effect that I’ve mentioned several times already. They’ve won awards for their summer camp program, created a promotional 4-color magazine to promote the department’s capabilities, restored the skate park, hosted over 25 citywide league tournaments – including staffing the Tennessee Senior Olympic Games and more. The Champions Club Tennis Complex hosted 30 tournaments bringing in and estimated \$1.5 million in tourist revenue. With the aid of corporate sponsors the Therapeutic Recreation

Division added programs for people with disabilities and for people recovering from traumatic experiences of various types. The Department of Parks and Recreation scored advances at our public golf courses at the Zoo – which added new exhibits and animals oversaw the opening of Heritage Park and Renaissance Park. It's important to note that this department also has an economic effect upon tourism revenues. With that in mind, let me point out the new parks proposed for the benefit of the entire region: A new softball complex to be built in East Brainerd near the old landfill – in fact on property that I bought years ago when I was Public Works Commissioner for expansion of the landfill – something thankfully that never occurred. The second park is a restoration and redirection of Montague Park into a soccer complex and sculpture garden. This innovative and adaptive reuse will take advantage of the more stable portions of this old city dump site while relating beautifully to the changing demographics of the adjacent neighborhoods. The growing artist community on Main Street – and especially sculptor John Henry – has promised to make this garden park an interesting and animated place. The final plan is for the renovation of Warner Park – enhancing the beauty and utility of this old flagship facility and complimenting the plans for the zoo to extend a new entrance to Holtzclaw Avenue. Great plans for a great future for a great Department.

On the issue of park plans, it's not shown here tonight because it's federal – not local – but I cannot even begin to project or predict the positive effect of Moccasin Bend National Park. In a sense, our city began there – and – considering the work of the Moccasin Bend Task Force more than 25 years ago – the rebirth of our city began there. We must work with our county, state and federal partners to make this important and long overdue new park a reality – and the sooner the better.

It's hard for me to believe but almost exactly 20 years ago I hired Beverly Johnson to become the first woman Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Public Works. She excelled in that position until I convinced her to move up to Administrator of the Department of Neighborhood Services – and then we added the division of Community Development. Once again, she hasn't disappointed me as she has reorganized and reenergized that department and pushed them on to new records of accomplishment.

She's given me a report of the more than 21 thousand inspections conducted, the responses to more than 10 thousand complaints and the more than 76 hundred violations recorded. The Department of Neighborhood Services is making a difference – a positive difference. They've taken almost 3 thousand cases to Environmental Court and participated in 158 Neighborhood Association Meetings. Just this week, the department embarked on a new leadership training program to prepare even more people in the city to take charge of their communities. On other fronts, the department hosted the World Changers faith-based initiative in conjunction with our local Front Porch Alliance to utilize young volunteers to repair 31 homes owned by senior, handicapped or low to moderate income individuals. The department oversaw the distribution of almost \$5 million in HUD block grant funds to aid a range of community needs. The Neighborhood Partners Projects creates opportunities for neighborhood based organizations to make their communities stronger, safer and healthier places to live, work and play. Twenty-five neighborhood associations were awarded \$50,985 to implement development, safety and beautification projects. Finally, in partnership with the Urban League of Greater Chattanooga, the department provided funding to assist low to moderate income residents with free tax preparation to claim earned income tax credit refunds for eligible taxpayers. Just in 2006 the department employed 95 volunteers to provide service at 9 sites. Assistance was provided to 2213 eligible taxpayers including 392 who were eligible for Earned Income Tax Credit. The campaign yielded \$2,228,858 in federal tax refunds and \$74,894 in Earned Income Tax Credit returns. In addition to putting all that money into our citizen's pockets, the City and the Urban League saved citizens the cost of fees and services to a total of almost \$150,000 – clearly a winner all around.

There are more improvements and innovations in government.

The Personnel Department led by Donna Kelley initiated new ways to use the computer to apply for city employment. They are overseeing a new pay study and they have successfully launched Phase II of the employee wellness program. With over 7000 primary care office visits to date, we are expecting to meet or exceed our original projection of 7% savings in primary care claim costs. In addition, we have the benefit of



healthier employees and some are alive today as a result of our new emphasis on early detection and health maintenance.

The Internal Audit Division headed by Stan Sewell has focused audits on strengthening internal controls to safeguard city funds and assets. Some of their accomplishments have resulted in the potential return of millions of dollars to the city. Some of their actions have resulted in multiple felony indictments that will serve as a deterrent to others who might consider defrauding the City. Still the main purpose of the department is simply to provide better controls and an increased level of accountability for the City and its citizens. They are necessary new functions that are already paying dividends.

More about dollars and sense: The city's Finance Division headed by famously frugal (some might even say extremely cheap – and that's a good thing) CFO Daisy Madison has received awards and accolades. They were awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for the Fiscal Year 2006 Comprehensive Financial Report and also received the 11<sup>th</sup> GFOA Distinguished Budget Award. Through the considerable efforts of this department, the City maintained AA bond ratings from Fitch and Standard and Poor's Investor's Service due to the City's strong fiscal position and professional financial management.

Last, but not least, Bernadine Turner has continued her excellent service as Administrator of Human Services and the department has continued to serve a countywide population with one of the finest Headstart programs in the country.

There is one more thing that I need to mention – that falls outside of our departmental structure. People might be waiting for me to mention it, so I will .... but I don't intend to dwell on it.

I'll only say this about the homeless situation. Again, prevention is cheaper than correction. The principal items proposed in our plans for the farmer's market property are principal items proposed in Chattanooga's existing Blueprint. We have cited chapter

and verse of recommendations from the Blueprint. Accordingly, we are moving ahead with funding for the Community Kitchen's drop in center and respite care facility. The Chattanooga Area Homebuilders Association has offered to build a new structure to house the Interfaith Homeless Network and both downtown shelters have indicated a desire to move from their current locations. We must do more than create committees and rewrite plans. We must move forward. "Housing First" is a catchy slogan but common sense requires that candidates for housing must pass through some sort of a portal to be wrapped in services to prevent failure of the effort. That's all that we are proposing. Perhaps we should call our proposed "one stop shop" a "no stop shop" since the intent is simply to get people off the streets – not assign them long-term to warehousing in shelters. I am pleased for now to await the recommendations of Councilman Pierce and Councilwoman Bennett's committee and the work of our local chapter of AIA. Still, if we want to do something about panhandling, we must provide an alternative. We must move forward.

Now, let's look to the future and to a new initiative – something that I believe holds bright promise for our future and our children's future.

Chattanooga is a network of communities, woven together to produce centers of growth, connections and knowledge.

More than 20 years ago, citizens from all walks of life came together to reinvent and rebuild this city. They envisioned great things for a city in transition. They understood that the natural beauty of this area was a catalyst for a new beginning. Their vision was based on building strong communities that offered great places to work, to play and to raise a family. But these communities were not based solely on geographic boundaries, bricks and mortar but on thoughts, ideas...knowledge. No doubt some of the communities came together along natural and man-made limits but others were mere ideas yet to be defined.

These communities spread from the inner city, down to the riverfront, to areas that thrived in previous generations to areas that were longing for development. For us communities are more than physical locations, zip codes or tax districts.

They are the way we define ourselves.

Communities come together through common interests such as school districts where children are assembled to learn, to share and to achieve. Other communities are built as neighborhoods where people with similar interests work for safe streets, good homes and local pride. Yet other communities are defined by where we worship and today religious voices bridge a multitude of cultures, races and genders.

Robert Oppenheimer said, “The open society, the unrestricted access to knowledge...these are what may make a vast, complex, ever growing, ever changing and ever more expert technological world, nevertheless a world of human community.”

And so it is about knowledge and its growth that I want to spend a few minutes.

Great cities, great civilizations are known as centers of learning, of knowledge. And at the foundation of that knowledge and learning are places that draw people together to share ideas, to learn from others past and present and to encourage minds to be opened up to consume information.

Libraries serve this role.

Whether in a public school, on a college campus, downtown or down the street, or a small area in a recreation center or a church, a few books, a few chairs are welcome signs to come in and learn, to share, to exchange ideas with old masters and new friends.

Augustine Birrell said, “Libraries are not made; they grow.”

So let’s make a commitment here today to grow together.

In 1976 Chattanooga came together to mark the bicentennial of America with a new library. Now, more than 30 years later, let’s renew their commitment and make it grow.

A library is a place of learning where stacks of books invite people from all walks of life to enter into new worlds. But more than 30 years later, the library is more. It is a place where ideas are exchanged, where people discuss topics of the day in the context of thinking in the past.

It is a place to soar across the globe on the lines of an Internet-connected computer or a settle in for a nice, quiet read across rolling plains from various corners of the world. Libraries are learning centers where knowledge is exchanged. Not mere bricks and mortar, but places where the only barriers are the limits to our own imagination. To that end, I have assembled a small group of local citizens to help us explore how to make the Library grow across our communities so that Chattanooga is also known as a center for learners as well as a great place to live, to work and to play.

The fabric of a strong community comes from the many pieces that are woven together. It is more than mere words or a set of desires that never are fulfilled. It is a commitment to be better tomorrow than today; to provide a brighter future from those who come behind and not to be satisfied with the status quo.

It is a CAN DO attitude and not a HAVE DONE approach.

Small pieces, small steps can be the foundation for a brighter tomorrow. Along that line, I believe Chattanooga is poised to further define the term – community. To give more reason for leaders from various cities and towns across America to come here to learn how to make things happen.

There are new communities developing here.

To refocus our vision and to take advantage of related new initiatives at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga plus to advance the city in a new and special way, I have asked Jim Kennedy III of Kenco Group to add to his considerable corporate and community endeavors a new effort to redefine our approach to our library system. He has accepted and over the next few weeks and perhaps months will be gathering that small group of

citizens into a new commission to undertake the work. We will staff this rather creative and visionary project with Karen McMahon who, despite her still youthful appearance is another seasoned veteran of Chattanooga's success in remaking itself. She worked with me at Chattanooga Venture more than 20 years ago. Most recently Karen was principally responsible for the innovations in thinking that led to our clinics and wellness program – an example of her creative yet practical abilities. This will be fun and this will impact our community in ways that can not yet be recognized. Expect to be surprised.

With that, let me thank you once again for coming and sitting patiently and listening tonight. It has been long and perhaps too detailed in some places, but at this point, at this midpoint it has been necessary.

I hope it has been informative and reassuring that The State of the City is good. There are economic promises on the horizon and this city that has seen so much transformation – the most transformed city in America – still has its best days ahead.

Last week I was in Shanghai, China at the invitation and expense of the Urban Land Institute – an international trade association of the development industry. Chattanooga was featured on a panel with the mayors of Perth, Australia; Pasadena, California; and Xian, China (where the terra cotta soldiers were discovered some years ago). We have gained international recognition and we are taking steps to take advantage of our new found popularity. Interestingly, on the closing day of my conference, I learned that Nashville was in town on a trade mission. They were having a reception for Chinese business leaders and they were kind enough to invite me. Mayor Purcell introduced me and commented that while he couldn't get me to come to Nashville, when they are seeking business in Shanghai, here I came. I was sensitive to the fact that Nashville was paying the bill for the meeting, but I did shake a few hands and pocket a few cards. Nashville is aggressively seeking business and we are right there as well. Tomorrow, County Mayor Ramsey and I will be flying out – first to Washington and then on to Chicago – to seek economic benefits for our community. We have never had a better

working relationship or a better team at the Chamber of Commerce working for the benefit of Chattanooga and Hamilton County. Your interests are well served.

Finally, let me thank especially Dan Johnson, Chief of Staff and my partner in all that has been accomplished these 24 fast and furious months. Plus Anita Ebersole and Marie Chinery – Deputies that keep us on track and do more to keep the whole city train on track than perhaps they expected when they signed on – but Anita should have known better – she’s been here before.

A special note of thanks to Michelle Michaud who helped us all get the message out day after day and night after night. She’s a professional who – as one local news reporter said to me last week – always answered the phone no matter the hour. She will be missed. Best wishes to you Michelle as you go to a higher calling.

And thank you members of the City Council. We are a team and you are all representing your constituents well. We don’t always agree ... and we aren’t always supposed to agree ... but I hope that you know how much I respect you all and the role that you play in making us a better community.

Yes, the State of the City is good. The first two years have been exciting and I personally look forward to the second half of this administration.

God Bless America and God Bless this beautiful City that He gave us:

**Chattanooga.**